a data cube he sifted out of the clutter. He cleared his throat. "Ordinarily I wouldn't let this go beyond the medical report, and maybe I'm sticking both feet in my mouth, but he might have to talk to someone about it, and chances are that would be you--"

"Talk about what? What's wrong?"

McCoy's hands stilled on the desk and he met Kirk's eyes with a troubled gaze. "Spock's been sexually abused."

"What?" It was almost a whisper.

"I said he's been sexually abused. Raped."

A chill chased itself down Kirk's spine while the readouts in the darkened room outside blinked garnet and aquamarine, and topaz. It had been his decision to send T'serek and Spock, half hoping they would solve his problem for him....

"You're quite sure it wasn't...voluntary?"

McCoy frowned. "His thighs, buttocks and abdomen are bruised and abraded. His wrists and ankles are raw. He's been bleeding internally." A little acid tinged his voice. "And we're talking about Spock. In my mind that adds up to rape."

"All right. You're right. I--just don't know what to say. God damn it, I sent him down there! Were the others...?"

"No. T'serek had the same cuts and burns Spock did, in a lesser degree. The two women are in traumatic shock. Nothing else."

Kirk took a long breath and tried to deal with it. Rape. With Spock as victim. Spock, who had once preferred death rather than admit the primitive necessity of the pon farr; Spock, whom it shamed to acknowledge friendship. Oh, no. Spock would not want to discuss rape. James Kirk didn't want to discuss it. He had felt the illogical shame that comes from being the victim in torture, arising from the defenceless body's ready acquiesence to fear, but that is an adversary relationship. It does not reduce one to the level of object, because no one consents to torture. Even his own first thought had been--

McCoy watched the progression of Kirk's thoughts with sweating empathy, saw them come around to the one that troubled him most.

"Goren said he was with Spock for all but about an hour and a half at the first, and the last few minutes before we beamed them up. He said Spock had been questioned."

"It wasn't recent, Jim."

Kirk ran a hand over his face. "Then the others didn't know about it. I guess that's something. Not much. What can I do?"

What could any of them do? McCoy commanded the most up to date equipment and techniques of modern medicine. He could heal Spock's nearly destroyed hands, but he couldn't work miracles. He could not alter the past.

"Just--be here when he comes out of it. Debrief the others yourself, just in case. Let him know you're willing to listen."

Nadia and Sunderson came off the sick list first. Nadia had heard of her attack on him and was embarrassed by it. He had to hear her assume responsibility for the ineptness of people he had picked for her. When McCoy said T'serek could talk, he had to face the boy's muted grief and stern self-control while he blamed himself for multiple failures--failure to anticipate the trap, failure to confiscate the energy weapon, failure to stay with his men, to have secured Clement with the women. Kirk's own reports of their actions commended T'serek, Palevi and Spock and left his own part open to any punitive action the Fleet might see fit to take. No real risk. Once again the Enterprise had pulled the chestnuts from the fire, and at a distance of light years, no one was going to find the price of Clement, Craven and Hillis too high to pay.

In the three long days before Spock showed signs of coming out of his healing trance, McCoy watched James Kirk shoulder the full weight of that responsibility and add it to the burden he would never put down while he lived--the long list of bad decisions, errors, and human failures for which there are no medals.

When the call did come, McCoy had timed it at the end of a duty day. Kirk was tired and it took a conscious effort not to drag his feet to the turbolift, which, for a change, seemed to be operating at top efficiency. He knew he had to be there when Spock woke up and his own reluctance disgusted him. He had been the one contemplating the further shores of sensation, why should he now be afraid that one imposed experience would change Spock past recognition? In passing, he noticed that T'serek had been released. He looked from the empty bed to McCoy.

"I let him go," McCoy answered the unasked question. "He's as bad a patient as you are. I don't want him standing duty yet, though."

"Okay. Spock's coming out of it?"

"Any time."

McCoy's nurses and lab techs were changing shifts. The two men waited for the commotion to die down.

"How are his hands?" Kirk asked.

"Healing. The Vulcan nervous system is more complex than the human, and nerves give us the most trouble. Aside from that, the obvious wounds are taken care of. We're getting some anomalies in his readings, but that could be due to the depth of the stress. He kept going too long."

McCoy's casual tone didn't fool Kirk. They were both stalling, not wanting to face the moment when the Vulcan's eyes would open.

"Get on with it," Kirk said. He tried to school his face to the expression of concern and welcome that should be all it showed.

McCoy brought Spock out of his trance with the usual drastic measures--three stinging slaps that enabled the Vulcan to focus once again on the larger world without. Spock opened his eyes as if he'd been awake all along, just waiting for this cue. He took in his familiar surroundings without even a raised eyebrow. For a moment Kirk thought he wasn't truely conscious yet, but then the lights